

6. Al-Jahiz & Al-Khwārizmī.

Al-Jahiz.

Introduction:

Abū Uthmān Amr ibn Baḥr al-Kinānī al-Baṣrī (776–868/869 AD), famously known as al-Jāḥiẓ, was a great Arab writer, thinker, and scholar. He is considered one of the most brilliant prose authors of the Abbasid period.

Full name, parent name:

His full name was Abū Uthmān Amr ibn Baḥr ibn Maḥbūb al-Kinānī al-Baṣrī. He was nicknamed al-Jāḥiẓ, meaning 'the one with bulging eyes.' He came from a poor family in Basra, Iraq and his father was a fishmonger.

Early life & background:

Al-Jāḥiẓ was born around 776 AD in Basra. Despite being from a humble background, he showed a great love for knowledge. He sold fish to support himself while studying. He was surrounded by the vibrant intellectual culture of Basra, which was a center of learning. Al-Jāḥiẓ was a Sunni Muslim connected with the Mutazilite sect (maslak) of theology, which valued reason and logic in religion. But not mainly known for following a particular sect (maslak) (Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, or Hanbali) because at that time the 4 (hanafi, maliki, shafi, hanbali) sunni sect (maslak) were not fully formed; he was most strongly linked with the Mutazilite sect (maslak)—a rationalist movement in early Islam that emphasized reason and logic in religion. He did not belong to Shī'a traditions.

Personality:

He was known for his sharp wit, curiosity, and humor. His nickname came from his physical appearance, but his personality shone through his intelligence and creativity.

Mutazilite sect (maslak) school of thought:

The Mutazilites were a group of Muslim thinkers in the 8th–10th AD who believed that reason (aql) and logic were very important in understanding religion. They wanted to make faith rational and logical. Their main ideas:

Allah is perfectly just and fair – Allah never does wrong, and humans are fully responsible for their own actions. The Quran is created – unlike traditional Sunni belief that the Quran is eternal, Mutazilites argued it was “created” by Allah in time. Free will – humans are free to choose good or bad; Allah does not force people. Reason and logic – they believed Muslims should use their minds, not just tradition, to understand faith. Justice and unity of Allah – they strongly rejected any idea that could weaken the belief in one Allah.

Al-Jāḥiẓ belonged to the Mutazilite sect (maslak), which focused a lot on reason and logic in religion. He was famous for questioning things that did not seem rational to him. One of the topics he wrote about was the ḥadīths narrated by Abū Huraira (r.a), (a close companion of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ) that Abū Huraira narrated more ḥadīths than almost any other companion, thousands in number, even though he

only spent a few years with the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Jāḥiẓ and other rationalist scholars found this difficult to accept and argued that it was not possible for one person to report so many sayings in such a short time. He also suggested that some of these narrations might have been misunderstood or reported incorrectly.

However, most Sunni scholars strongly defended Abū Huraira (r.a). They explained that Abū Huraira had a very sharp memory & Prophet ﷺ himself prayed for Abu Huraira that, Allah blessed him with the ability to remember and preserve the sayings of the Prophet. This is why great scholars like Imām al-Bukhārī and Imām Muslim included many of Abū Huraira's narrations in their most authentic ḥadīth collections. In summary, Al-Jāḥiẓ was critical of the large number of ḥadīths narrated by Abū Huraira, but mainstream Sunni Islam accepted Abū Huraira as a reliable and trustworthy source.

In which caliphate:

He lived during the Abbasid Caliphate, which was the golden age of Islamic culture, literature, and science.

His teacher; education & influences:

He studied under famous scholars of Basra, learning Arabic literature, poetry, theology, and natural sciences. He was deeply influenced by Mu'tazilite theologians and also absorbed knowledge from Greek philosophy and Persian literature.

Career & historical context:

Al-Jāḥiẓ became a famous writer in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. He wrote for caliphs and noblemen, gaining patronage from rulers like al-Mamūn. His career reflected the intellectual richness of the Abbasid era, when translations of Greek works and debates in theology were flourishing.

Major work/books:

He wrote over 200 books, though many are lost. His most famous works include 'Kitāb al-Ḥayawān' (Book of Animals), an encyclopedia of animals mixed with literature, poetry, and anecdotes. Another major work is 'Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn' (Book of Eloquence and Demonstration), a masterpiece on Arabic rhetoric and literature. He also wrote 'Kitāb al-Bukhalā'' (Book of Misers), a humorous and satirical work about human behavior. His books combine science, culture, and humor in a unique style.

Contribution in modern science:

His observations in 'Kitāb al-Ḥayawān' are considered early contributions to zoology. He discussed animal behavior, adaptation, and even ideas similar to natural selection. His works also influenced later Arabic literature and philosophy. He described the behavior and characteristics of animals, including adaptation to their environment (an early idea similar to natural selection). He also used humor and stories to make science enjoyable.

Technic & thoughts:

Al-Jāḥiẓ's technique combined scientific observation with storytelling. He believed in using reason, logic, and humor to explain complex ideas. As part of the Mu'tazilite tradition, he valued rational thinking in both science and religion.

Death & legacy:

He died around 868/869 AD in Basra. According to stories, he died when a pile of books fell on him in his library. His legacy is enormous in Arabic prose, literature, and early science. He remains one of the most original minds of the Abbasid age.

Critical/critics perspectives:

Some conservative scholars criticized him for his Mutazilite views, while others praised his intelligence and style. Modern scholars admire his ability to mix science, literature, and humor, making knowledge enjoyable.

Conclusion:

Al-Jāhīz was a Sunni Muslim scholar and Mu'tazilite thinker whose writings made a lasting impact on Arabic literature, zoology, and culture. His unique style and rational approach continue to inspire readers and scholars worldwide.

Al-Khwārizmī

Introduction:

Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (780–850 AD) was a famous Muslim mathematician, astronomer, and geographer. He is often called the 'father of algebra' because of his groundbreaking work in mathematics.

Full name, parent name:

His full name was Abū Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī. He was born in Khwarizm (in present-day Uzbekistan). His father was Mūsā, but little is known about his family background.

Early life & background:

Al-Khwārizmī was born around 780 AD in Khwarizm, a region in Central Asia. Later, he moved to Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, which later became the greatest center of knowledge in the world.

Personality:

He was known for being intelligent, precise, and hardworking. He was a Sunni Muslim, though sources do not clearly mention if he followed a specific maslak (sect) for ex. Hanafi, Shafi'i, etc. Most historians simply describe him as a Sunni scholar working under the Abbasid Caliphs. (At that time, the sunni sect maslak were not fully developed).

In which caliphate:

He lived during the Abbasid Caliphate, under the rule of Caliphs al-Mamūn and al-Mutaṣim. This was a golden period of scientific discovery and translation of Greek and Indian works into Arabic.

His teacher; education & influences:

Details of his direct teachers are not well known, but he was strongly influenced by Greek, Indian, and Persian science. He studied at the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma) in Baghdad, which was established by Caliph al-Mamūn as a great center of learning.

Career & historical context:

Al-Khwārizmī worked as a scholar at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad. He was part of a team that translated and expanded scientific works from Greek, Indian, and Persian sources. His career took place in the Abbasid golden age of science.

Major work/books:

His most famous book is 'Kitāb al-Jabr wa al-Muqābala' (The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing). This book introduced algebra as a separate field of mathematics. He also wrote important works in astronomy and geography, such as 'Zīj al-Sindhind' (astronomical tables) and a revised world map. His Latin translations introduced algebra and Arabic numerals to Europe.

Contribution in modern science:

Al-Khwārizmī gave the world the term 'algebra' from his book. He also introduced the decimal positional number system and algorithms (his name is the origin of the word 'algorithm'). His works shaped European mathematics and science for centuries.

Technic & thoughts:

His method was systematic and practical. He solved mathematical problems step by step, focusing on clarity and application in trade, inheritance, and daily life. He believed in organizing knowledge so it could be useful to society.

Death & legacy:

He died around 850 AD in Baghdad. His works were translated into Latin in the 12th century and became the standard in European universities for hundreds of years. His legacy as the 'father of algebra' is recognized worldwide.

Critical/critics perspectives:

Some critics say his works were mostly based on earlier Greek and Indian sources, but his true achievement was organizing, expanding, and presenting them clearly. Others argue that his originality in algebra was unmatched in his time.

Conclusion:

Al-Khwārizmī was a Sunni Muslim scholar whose work has changed the history of mathematics, astronomy, and geography. He was not known to belong to any specific maslak (sect) but he is remembered as one of the greatest scientific minds of the Abbasid Golden Age. His contributions laid the foundation for modern mathematics and science.